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ABSTRACT

In 1990, as part of an effort to assess the effectiveness of the transfer function, Johnson County Community College (JCCC), in Kansas, conducted a follow-up study of former students who had transferred in 1989. Questionnaires were sent to a sample of 1,277 JCCC transfer students identified through a list of all active and former students who requested transcripts during the 1988-89 academic year and lists from 11 transfer institutions. The survey included questions on demographics, JCCC enrollment history, educational goal attainment, evaluation of cognitive and affective outcomes, evaluation of educational and support services, and overall evaluation of JCCC experiences. Survey results, based on a response rate of 39.3%, (n=502), included the following: (1) of the 82.1% of the students who identified transfer as their primary goal, 53.2% completely achieved and 39.0% partially achieved that goal; (2) 73.4% of the students felt JCCC had helped them improve writing skills, 67% that it had enhanced their self-confidence, and 66.7% that it had broadened their knowledge of arts and sciences; (3) 63.1% indicated that they would attend JCCC again, while 92.8% would recommend JCCC to a friend; and (4) statistics provided by transfer institutions indicated that 28.9% had grade point averages (GPA's) between 3.00 and 3.99, while 27.7% had GPA's between 2.00 and 2.99. Aside from indications that the college was effective for at least some aspects of the transfer mission, the results also confirmed that the methodology employed can be a valuable component of institutional effectiveness assessment. (KP)

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Assessing the Effectiveness of the Transfer Function in the Community College

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study which was conducted in 1990 to evaluate the effectiveness of a major midwestern community college in preparing students for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. A follow-up survey was sent to former students who had transferred during 1989 to elicit their opinions and perceptions describing their educational experiences, level of satisfaction with college, achievement of educational objectives, and academic progress at both the community college and recipient four-year institution. In addition, data pertaining to the students' current academic performance were supplied by the college and universities to which they transferred. This paper presents the results of the study. The information should be of interest to two and four-year colleges and universities concerned with the preparation of students for transfer and with the utilization of surveys to assess the effectiveness of this function.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely held that the historical roots of today's community colleges lie in the mission to provide transfer-oriented education for students (e.g., Brint & Karabel, 1989). Therefore, it is not surprising that a major mission of many, if not most, two-year colleges is the preparation of students for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. Assessing effectiveness of this transfer function poses a significant challenge for the typical community college. As noted by Bers, Seybert, and Friedel (1990), effectiveness of transfer preparation is not only a complex concept, it is also one that is difficult to measure. Various measures of transfer effectiveness have been suggested. These include the percentage of community college students who transfer, academic performance at the four-year institution, the percentage of transfer students who receive bachelor's degrees, student satisfaction with transfer preparation at the community college, and courses/credits that transfer.

Seybert, Conklin, and Della Mea (1989) described a comprehensive, systematic model for assessing student educational goal attainment. A key component of this model was a process for assessing educational goal attainment of former community college students who had transferred to four-year colleges and universities. This process was piloted in 1989 using students who had attended a major comprehensive

community college from 1974 through 1988. Specifically, these students were surveyed in an effort to assess the college's effectiveness in preparing them for transfer. The survey was designed to gain information regarding the following questions:

1. Do transfer students accomplish their educational objectives at the community college?

2. How do transfer students evaluate their educational experiences at the community college?

3. How do transfer students evaluate community college and senior institution services?

4. Do transfer students succeed at four-year colleges and universities?

The 1989 pilot study yielded the following major results:

1. The vast majority of responding transfer students indicated that they had achieved their educational objective at the community college.

2. Most expressed satisfaction with their educational experiences at the community college and indicated that they had improved in a variety of cognitive and non-cognitive areas.

3. Generally, the respondents expressed a greater level of satisfaction with various aspects of college at the community college than at the recipient four-year college or university.

4. A high percentage performed well academically at the community college and maintained that level of performance at recipient institutions.

After several modifications were made to the process, the college conducted its first annual transfer follow-up study in 1990. The purpose of this paper is to report the results of that study.

JCCC TRANSFER FOLLOW-UP STUDY

The Office of Institutional Research at Johnson County Community College (JCCC) conducts an annual transfer follow-up study. Thus, in 1990 a follow-up study of former JCCC students who had transferred during 1989 was conducted.

Method

The target population of 1277 JCCC transfer students was identified by a combination of methods. First, a list of all active and former students who requested transcripts during the 1988-89 academic year was obtained from the Admissions Office. Early in the 1990 Spring semester, postcards were sent to these individuals requesting initial information to identify those who had actually transferred to four-year

colleges or universities after the Fall 1988 or Spring 1989 semesters or during the Fall 1989 semester. Second, lists of students who had transferred from JCCC were obtained from 11 of the 17 recipient institutions to which most of the students transfer. Finally, information from both the postcards and the lists were merged and duplicates were eliminated. Individuals so identified were sent a survey in March and a follow-up survey approximately one month later. The survey included questions concerning the following areas:

- Demographics
- JCCC enrollment history
- Educational goal attainment information
- Evaluation of cognitive and affective outcomes
- Evaluation of educational and support services
- Overall evaluation of JCCC experiences

A total of 502 completed surveys were received (292 from the initial mailing and 210 from the follow-up mailing) for an overall response rate of 39.3 percent.

In addition to the survey data, current student information, including data on academic performance (e.g., number of hours attempted, number of hours completed, and cumulative GPA) were supplied for each student by the transfer institutions. Both these and survey data were included in the data analysis file.

Results

A complete description of the results of the 1990 JCCC transfer follow-up survey have been reported elsewhere (Johnson County Community College, Office of Institutional Research, 1990). While space does not permit a complete description of those findings here, selected results will be presented.

Demographic Profile. The JCCC transfer follow-up survey includes several items designed to collect general demographic information. These data are displayed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 Here

The average age of the responding transfer students was 23.8. Sixty percent of the respondents were female and over 91 percent were Caucasian-American.

Educational Goal Attainment. As has been argued elsewhere (Seybert, 1990), student achievement of educational objective is a primary index of community college effectiveness. Thus, an important component of the JCCC transfer follow-up survey deals with this issue. These data are illustrated in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 Here

As is clear in this table, most students who transferred during 1989 did achieve their educational objective.

More than 92 percent of the respondents indicated that they did so, either completely or partially.

College Experiences/Affective Outcomes. The survey asks a series of questions regarding students' experiences at the college. Many of these items are also designed to gather information regarding students' perceptions of the affective outcomes of their college experiences. Survey results concerning these items can be seen in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 Here

A majority of the respondents reported gains or improvements in all areas represented in the survey. Nearly three out of four indicated that JCCC had helped them improve their written communication skills and approximately two-thirds indicated that their experiences at the community college had helped broaden their knowledge of the arts and sciences and enhance their self-confidence. Approximately 64 percent of the respondents indicated that their community college experiences had helped them expand their tolerance for people and ideas and over 60 percent felt that their experiences had helped them improve their oral communication skills. Roughly one in two indicated that their JCCC experiences had helped them clarify personal values and goals and improve in the areas of time management, decision-making, and interpersonal skills.

Satisfaction with JCCC. Several survey items deal with students' overall reactions to JCCC. These data are displayed in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 Here

Over 80 percent indicated that apart from the financial benefit, JCCC had helped improve the quality of their life. Eighty-seven percent indicated that they would attend the college again and nearly 93 percent would recommend it to friends.

Evaluation of Educational and Support Services. The survey also includes a series of items regarding former transfer students' evaluations of a variety of educational and support services both at JCCC and the senior institution to which they transferred. These data can be seen in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 Here

A majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with all services at the community college except job placement and availability of financial aid. Importantly, more than two-thirds were satisfied with the way the college prepared them for their transfer experiences.

On a comparative basis, the level of satisfaction with various aspects of college was greater at JCCC than at the four-year

college or university attended, particularly with regard to the registration process, helpfulness and individual attention of faculty, and convenience of class scheduling.

A greater percentage of respondents expressed satisfaction with job placement services, availability of financial aid, and the variety of courses at the four year college or university attended than at JCCC.

Academic Performance at JCCC. Another component of the survey deals with the transfer students' academic performance while attending JCCC. These data are included in Table 6.

Insert Table 6 Here

Three out of four respondents indicated that they made mostly A's and B's at the community college. On the average, they completed approximately 34 credit hours and less than 22 percent earned an Associate's degree.

Academic Performance at Transfer Institutions. Data on the academic performance of former JCCC students at recipient colleges and universities were supplied by those institutions. These data are displayed in Table 7.

Insert Table 7 Here

Former JCCC students completed an average of 15.7 credit hours at the time they completed the survey and maintained a 2.81 GPA.

Data regarding JCCC transfer students' performance at four-year institutions in selected major fields of study are illustrated in Table 8.

Insert Table 8 Here

Average GPA's for selected majors ranged from 2.56 in engineering to 3.15 in health-related disciplines.

Discussion

The results of the transfer follow-up study reported here provide at least initial answers to the basic questions posed earlier regarding the effectiveness of transfer preparation at JCCC. Specifically, the large majority of these former students indicated that they achieved their educational objective at the community college. In addition, in most cases they provided positive evaluations of their experiences and services received and indicated that they had grown in a variety of cognitive and non-cognitive areas. Further, they performed well academically both at JCCC and during their first semester at a four-year college or university. Thus, on an institutional level, the results of the study provide important evidence that, at least for some aspects of the transfer mission, the college is effective.

On another level, the results of this study confirm that the methodology employed can be a valuable component in an overall effort to assess an institution's effectiveness. Results of such a study can provide answers to several of the major questions regarding a college's success in carrying out its transfer mission.

Conclusions

The results of this study provide at least initial answers to the four major questions posed earlier to assess the effectiveness of the transfer function. The study demonstrated that, at least at one large comprehensive community college, transfer students by and large achieve their educational objectives, provide positive evaluations of their community college experiences and the services they received, and perform well academically both at the community college and at four-year colleges and universities.

While the methodologies employed here have provided valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the transfer function, it is clear that they are by no means complete, and need to be improved. For example, additional steps should be taken to determine transfer students' success at the four-year college or university. Such efforts have been initiated and should be reflected in future transfer follow-up studies.

Finally, the results of this study also indicate that the process described in this paper, a comprehensive, systematic approach to follow-up of former transfer students is an important component of a systematic effort to assess institutional effectiveness and may be of considerable value as a model for other community colleges. In addition, the approach suggested here may also be conducive to further applied and basic research on institutional effectiveness in general.

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Table 1

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

	Number of Responses	Percent
Gender		
Female	301	60.0%
Male	201	40.0
Age		
18 to 25	378	75.3%
26 to 30	43	8.6
31 to 35	17	3.4
36 to 40	28	5.6
41 to 50	21	4.2
Over 50	3	0.6
Unknown	12	2.4
Mean = 23.8; Median = 21.0		
Ethnic Distribution		
Caucasian-American/White	458	91.2%
American Indian or Alaskan	20	4.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	14	2.8
African-American/Black	5	1.0
Hispanic	3	0.6
Unknown	2	0.4

Table 2

JCCC EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE

	Number of Responses	Percent
Original Primary Educational Objective at JCCC		
Prepare to transfer	412	82.1%
Explore career possibilities	17	3.4
Prepare to enter job market	16	3.2
Remedy or review basic skills	10	2.0
Study topics of interest/ self-improvement	9	1.8
Prepare to change careers	7	1.4
Improve skills for present job	5	1.0
Other/unknown	26	5.2
Achieved Ultimate Educational Objective at JCCC		
Yes, completely	267	53.2%
Yes, partially	196	39.0
No	38	7.6
Unknown	1	0.2
JCCC Helped Achieve Objective		
Yes, completely	391	84.4%
Yes, partially	60	13.0
No	5	1.1
Unknown	7	1.5

Table 3

PERCEPTIONS OF JCCC EXPERIENCES

	JCCC Should Have Helped		JCCC Did Help	
	Number of Responses	Agree	Number of Responses	Agree
Improve writing skills	448	82.9%	454	73.4%
Improving speaking skills	428	69.1	435	60.2
Broaden knowledge of arts and sciences	428	66.6	430	66.7
Expand tolerance for others	433	66.0	442	63.7
Enhance self-confidence	435	65.0	442	67.0
Improve time management skills	432	63.0	442	50.9
Improve decision-making skills	425	57.1	432	51.4
Clarify personal values/goals	426	56.6	438	51.2
Improve interpersonal skills	428	52.1	435	53.6

NOTE: Data were collected utilizing a 5-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Thus, the "agree" columns include "strongly agree" and "agree" responses combined.

Table 4

SATISFACTION WITH JCCC

	Number of Responses	Percent
JCCC Improved Quality of Life		
Definitely	204	40.6%
Probably	200	39.8
Uncertain	63	12.5
Probably not	28	5.6
Definitely not	2	0.4
Unknown	5	1.0
If Starting Now, Would Attend JCCC Again		
Definitely	317	63.1%
Probably	120	23.9
Uncertain	25	5.0
Probably not	29	5.8
Definitely not	8	1.6
Unknown	3	0.6
Would Recommend JCCC to Friends		
Yes	466	92.8%
Unsure	26	5.2
No	9	1.8
Unknown	1	0.2

Table 5

SATISFACTION WITH VARIOUS ASPECTS OF COLLEGE

	JCCC		Four-Year College	
	Number of Responses	Satisfied	Number of Responses	Satisfied
Quality of instruction	495	86.5%	495	73.6%
Class scheduling	494	84.6	492	47.6
Facilities & equipment	476	84.5	471	67.8
Helpfulness/individual attention of faculty	496	83.9	496	58.1
Registration process	498	83.5	496	44.9
Variety of courses	493	75.7	495	82.6
Career/transfer preparation	478	67.2	339	37.4
Academic advising	478	62.4	486	55.2
Scholarships/financial aid	396	29.8	419	43.2
Job placement services	335	25.6	323	28.8

NOTE: Data were collected utilizing a 5-point scale ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. Thus, the "satisfied" column includes "very satisfied" and "somewhat satisfied" responses combined.

Table 6

JCCC ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

	Number of Responses	Percent
Credit Hours Completed		
1 to 5	63	12.5%
6 to 10	57	11.4
11 to 15	43	8.6
16 to 30	94	18.7
31 to 45	65	12.9
46 to 60	60	11.9
Over 60	100	19.9
Unknown	20	4.0
Mean = 33.8; Median = 30.0		
Grades		
Mostly A's	126	25.0%
Mostly A's & B's	178	35.5
Mostly B's	81	16.1
Mostly B's & C's	93	18.5
Mostly C's	16	3.2
Mostly C's & D's	6	1.2
Unknown	2	0.4
Earned Associate Degree		
Yes	107	21.3%
No	395	78.7

Table 7

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AT TRANSFER INSTITUTIONS

	Number of Responses	Percent
Credit Hours Completed		
1 to 25	333	66.3%
26 to 50	18	3.6
51 to 75	5	1.0
76 to 100	3	0.6
101 to 125	1	0.2
Unknown	142	28.3
Mean = 15.7; Median = 14.0		
Overall Grade Point Average		
0.00 to 0.99	6	1.2%
1.00 to 1.99	38	7.6
2.00 to 2.99	139	27.7
3.00 to 3.99	145	28.9
4.00	24	4.8
Unknown	150	29.9
Mean = 2.81; Median = 2.89		

Table 8

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED MAJORS
AT TRANSFER INSTITUTIONS

Major Area of Study	Mean GPA	Median GPA
Health	3.15	3.31
Social Sciences	3.01	3.20
Education	2.91	3.10
Business	2.83	3.00
Liberal Studies	2.67	2.68
Communication	2.61	2.65
Engineering	2.56	2.55

NOTE: A minimum of 20 JCCC transfer students were enrolled in each of these major areas of study.